

NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
Frequently Asked Questions
4-2-15

1. Who administers the Conservation Innovation Grants?

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

2. What is the purpose of CIG?

CIG is intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production.

3. What program funds CIG projects?

CIG was authorized under Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and funds for CIG come from EQIP.

4. Where can I find CIG funding opportunities?

Funding notices announcing the availability of funds are published annually on the Oregon NRCS CIG website

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/or/programs/?cid=nrcs142p2_044081 and on the Federal government's eGrants portal, www.grants.gov.

5. For FY15 what is the funding opportunity number?

AG-0436-G-15-0002

6. Who should I contact for additional information?

For programmatic information, please contact the Oregon CIG Program Manager at (503) 414-3292 or todd.peplin@or.usda.gov. For budget and administrative information, please contact the Oregon Contracting Officer at (503) 414-3213 or chris.martin@or.usda.gov.

7. How many years can a project last?

CIG projects are limited to three years.

8. Who is eligible to apply?

CIG applications are accepted from State or local units of government, federally-recognized Indian tribes, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals.

9. Where can I implement my project?

All 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), and the District of Columbia can apply HOWEVER the CIG project must be implementation in Oregon.

10. Do I need to provide additional funding for the project?

Selected applicants may receive grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide a 1:1 match of either cash or in-kind or combination of both.

11. Is there a formal definition for a “community-based organization?”

Recognized groups concerned with improving the quality of life for residents within local communities. Such organizations serve as project initiators and managers, thereby providing avenues for involvement with and access to locally led processes and activities. These groups include nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations with well-defined constituencies that include all or part of a particular community. Faith-based organizations, women’s groups, environmental groups, farm or woodlands groups, trade and professional associations, educational associations, and schools are all examples.

12. What is the definition of Historically Underserved Producers?

“Historically underserved individuals and groups include Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Indian Tribes, or Community-Based Organizations comprised of or representing these entities.”

13. Can you explain a bit more on the transferability requirement?

Projects results or products must, be useable for NRCS Oregon field staff and/or enhance State technical manuals or guidance documents and be applicable and adoptable to agricultural the agricultural community.

14. What other requirements do I need to meet?

CIG projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers (farmers, ranchers, or nonindustrial private timber producers NIPF). Applicants must describe the level of producer involvement in the application narrative.

15. Please expand on the project eligibility regarding Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) landowners. Do they have to be a matching partner in the grant or may they be participants?

In order for a project to be eligible for CIG, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements as set forth in 16 USC 3839aa-1. At the discretion of the applicant and project needs, a landowner can be either a matching funds partner or a participant

16. Is it necessary to involve EQIP eligible landowners directly in the project?

Yes, in order for a project to be eligible for CIG, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements as set forth in 16 USC 3839aa-1.

17. Regarding the Average Adjusted Gross Income for EQIP eligibility, this requirement is regardless of their size as long as it is 66 % of their profits?

A person or legal entity shall not be eligible to receive any benefit described in subparagraph (B₂) during a crop, fiscal, or program year, as appropriate, if the average adjusted gross of the person or legal entity exceeds \$900,000. This considers all income as adjusted gross income.

18. Can any agricultural producer that owns the land use these grants?

Yes, however if they are conducting the project activities on their own land exclusively, they must be EQIP-eligible and are subject to the 2014 Farm Bill EQIP payment limitations (\$450K).

19. If we have received a previous EQIP match, are we eligible for a CIG match?

The CIG funding level will depend on the type of EQIP match received. If the applicant is an agricultural producer or entity, then they must be EQIP-eligible and are subject to the 2014 Farm Bill EQIP payment limitations (\$450K).

20. The APF appears to say that cooperating farmers don't necessarily have to be landowners, just need to prove they have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract period (e.g. with a lease) - am I reading that correctly?

Yes. Control of land is a part of the EQIP eligibility requirement.

21. If the applicant conducts a project that involves cost sharing with landowners, do the landowners apply through EQIP, and if so, who signs off on the installed measures if NRCS cannot provide technical assistance under CIG?

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. NRCS will designate a Program Contact, Administrative Contact, and Technical Contact to provide oversight for each project receiving an award. Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in a project's geographic area through EQIP are ineligible for CIG funding except where the use of those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation.

22. Do projects need to address one of NRCS Oregon's State Priority?

To be given consideration the proposed project must identify one of the State Priority topics.

23. May multiple agencies join together for a single application?

Multiple agencies or other entities can work together as collaborators in one project proposal. However, only one agency or other entity can be the applicant.

24. Is there any guidance on sub-contractors arrangements?

The grantee is responsible for all sub-awards and assuring the responsible parties follow the appropriate terms and conditions. All sub-awards are subject to the same federal requirements as the grantee. The grantee is responsible for assuring/monitoring that the sub-awards follow the requirements. The grantee will also be the one penalized if there are issues with sub-award actions. (7CFR 3015 and 7 CFR 3016)

25. Can a USDA ARS collaborator be listed as a co-PI? They cannot receive funds though, correct?

Federal employees can serve as technical advisors on CIG project teams. They cannot receive recompense for serving in this role in the form of salary, honoraria, travel, or gifts.

26. Must the matching funds be secured at the proposal application time, or can they be pending?

At the time of proposal application, applicants must include written support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from non-federal third parties. Funds MUST be secured at time of grant agreement.

27. Can you specify what 'cash' match includes?

Third party as cash or cash from recipient's employee services.

28. Would staff time committed to the project by a project partner be considered cash or in-kind match? What other types of activities or experiences can be considered in-kind match?

Generally, staff time is considered in-kind since that person will be a paid staff member of the organization whether the NRCS proposal is funded or not. In some situations it might be cash: for example, if the staff incurs additional hours specifically for the project or if a person is hired specifically for the purpose of meeting a project requirement, then those hours could be counted as cash, unless their salary is to be paid by the grant. There may some donated equipment, information, or assistance where cash is not transferred that would be considered in-kind.

29. If monitoring is part of the project, and a State Agency uses state funds to cover the costs of analytical tests, would that be considered as 'cash match'?

To determine what costs are allowable Refer to the Federal Cost Principles for State, Local, Indian Tribal Governments, 2 CFR Part 225.

30. Are in-kind contributions (high tunnel, equipment, etc.) from farmers acceptable as matching funds?

Depending on the type of entity, please reference the applicable cost principle in Table A at the end of the FAQ to determine what costs are allowable.

31. Can any utility rebate be utilized as the cash part of the match?

Depending on the type of entity, please reference the applicable cost principle in Table A at the end of the FAQ to determine what costs are allowable.

32. Regarding indirect costs, can they be counted towards match of applicant? And would such match be considered cash match?

Yes the IDC can be counted towards a match. As it relates to cash match, it depends on whether the IDC rate is applied to the entire funded amount or a specific budget category that is supported by the budget narrative.

33. Can you confirm that we can request our full indirect cost rate on the USDA CIG program? We do have a federally negotiated rate of XX% for Research and XX% for Public Service/Extension.

Applicants wishing to claim indirect costs must have a federally approved indirect cost rate. This means that if you have a federally negotiated rate, you may claim indirect costs. Once your indirect cost rate agreement is received, eligible charges to the grant are dependent on that approved rate.

39. Are corporations eligible to apply?

Yes, eligible entities include federally recognized Indian tribes, State and local units of government, and non-governmental organizations and individuals. Corporations fall under the non-governmental organizations category.

40. Can an applicant apply for a national CIG and a state component CIG in the same year for the same project? (Understanding that one would be declined if the other was awarded)
Yes.

41. What involvement might a local NRCS office have in this application or project process?
CIG is a competitive grants process. NRCS personnel may provide general guidance to potential applicants on the appropriate forms to submit, program information, instruction on completing blocks or sections of forms, etc. Local NRCS offices cannot assist with the development of an application.

42. Is there a way for researchers to be involved in this grant program?
Even though CIG cannot fund research projects, researchers can offer or collaborate in projects that encompass the development, evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of conservation adoption approaches or incentive systems; or conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches; or environmental soundness with goals of environmental protection and natural resource enhancement.

43. While CIG does not fund research, it does encourage monitoring and data collection for the purposes of outreach and extension (transferability). Does that mean that it is still acceptable to publish the results of the data collected?
Yes. Publishing the results of the data collected is an example of transferability.

44. While CIG does not fund research, is capturing data to demonstrate the efficacy/utility of the activity to other landowners/operators an eligible activity (i.e., yield/cost data).
Yes. Capturing monitoring data and publicizing it can validate basic research data sets, expand the geographic coverage of existing data sets, and is an example of transferability.

45. If sampling or monitoring is required by the project activities, is a Lab certification required?
No, a Lab certification is not required.

46. Standard forms for application: I downloaded standard form 424 for federal assistance from grants.gov but the expiration date is 31/12/2012. Is it the correct form to fill in?
Yes, the forms are correct.

47. Can an applicant submit several applications?
Yes. If submitting applications for more than one project, submit a separate application for each project.

48. Can the proposed budget fund the purchase of equipment?
It will depend on the type of entity, please reference the applicable cost principle in Table A at the end of the FAQ to determine what costs are allowable.

49. If you are a current grantee can you still apply for the current CIG RFP?

Yes. It is recommended that there not be substantial overlap with or duplication of any previous or current CIG project's goals. Please refer to requirements found on page 15 of the APF, Article IV B 9; Declaration of Previous CIG Projects Involvement: Identify any previously awarded CIG projects related to this proposal and any of their principal investigators. Detail the purpose, outcomes to date, and how this new proposal relates to the previous award."

50. Is there a minimum grant amount that will be considered under this opportunity? (size of project that will be competitive?)

There is no minimum grant amount. However, the applicant should present a budget that demonstrates a successful completion of the project and that has secured contribution match.

51. How is the grant award distributed? Is it dispersed up front or must participants submit for reimbursement for project expenses?

Funding is disbursed on a reimbursable basis. Oregon NRCS will negotiate with the grantee and schedule identified deliverables on a quarterly basis. At each quarter the grantee will submit completed deliverables along with a request for reimbursement.

Table A: Federal Cost Principles

Type of Organization	Applicable Federal Cost Principle
Education Institution	2 CFR Part 220
Nonprofit Organization	2 CFR Part 230
State, Local, Indian Tribal Governments	2 CFR Part 225
Commercial Organizations	48 CFR Section 31.2